A>d מעפרות Gouvernment de la Nation Crie

Whapmagoostui ·Á∧Ld°⊃∆

Chisasibi Cらどん

Wemindji ·∆́Г°̀ Γ̀

Eastmain ∆\7°

Waskaganish -ḋʿb"∆bo∽

Nemaska ¬oГ¹b°

Waswanipi

ᡠ᠂ᢆᡈᠣᢥ

Ouje-Bougoumou ▷1>dJ

Mistissini 下いっと

MoCreebec Ĵbċ.V⁵

## **PRESS RELEASE**

## **Death of Joyce Echaquan at Joliette Hospital**

## Shows Need for Accountability to Defeat Culture of Racism and Impunity

Nemaska, Eeyou Istchee (September 29, 2020) – The circumstances of the death yesterday of Joyce Echaquan, a member of the Atikamekw of Manawan, at the Joliette Hospital are beyond shocking. They are shameful, a stain on the institution that was supposed to offer Ms. Echaquan care and compassion and instead showed her the most degrading contempt and verbal abuse. They show entrenched systemic racism at the Joliette Hospital, and a failure by the institution's administration to prevent and eliminate racism. The result was the agony suffered and recorded by Ms. Echaquan for the world to bear witness.

The abuse of Indigenous women by certain police officers in Val-d'Or led to the creation of the Viens Commission in December 2016. Its mandate was to look into discrimination against Indigenous peoples in six of Quebec's public services, including health and social services and police services. Over the next two years, hundreds of witnesses testified before the Commission. Many Indigenous persons told of their personal experience of racism and discrimination, including at some hospitals.

Exactly one year ago, the Viens Commission submitted its final report. The report found that members of First Nations and Inuit are victims of systemic discrimination in their relations with the public services. The report sets out 142 Calls for Action to address this discrimination, including 34 Calls for Action specifically for the health and social services sector.

And yet, for Joyce Echaquan, it was as if nothing had changed. The racist slurs and degradation she suffered at the Joliette Hospital were the same they might have been 50 years ago. The hospital staff did not see her as a human being, but as something that they could abuse with impunity.

And that is the heart of the problem. The conduct of the hospital staff yesterday was not an isolated event. Such conduct could only happen in an environment that tolerated it. The staff abused Joyce Echaquan because they thought that they could, with impunity, without consequences.

One of the staff who abused Joyce Echaquan has been dismissed. But that does not fix the underlying problem of systemic racism. The senior management of the institution is responsible for tolerating the culture of racism and impunity that made such abuse possible.

The Cree Nation recommended to the Viens Commission that, in order to defeat the culture of impunity at the Sûreté du Québec, senior management must be held accountable for the misconduct of individual officers. Lack of knowledge by senior officers could not excuse failure to take responsibility and corrective action.

ムトゼ ハマトックコン・ Cree Nation Government Gouvernement de la Nation Crie

The same principle of accountability applies in the case of Joyce Echaquan at the Joliette Hospital – its senior management, and that of the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) de Lanaudière, must be held accountable. Senior management is responsible for the conduct of its staff. Lack of knowledge is not an excuse. It is the duty of senior management to know, and to prevent or correct misconduct. Failure to meet this duty must have consequences.

## Grand Chief Abel Bosum stated:

"There is racism in Quebec and until we can put aside the petty arguments over semantics on whether it is systemic or not, until political leaders can put aside their pride and reach out to the other side instead of waiting for an invitation, until leaders have courage to show each other empathy without anticipation of gratitude, Quebec will be divided and fall short of its full potential."

Let the death of Joyce Echaquan not be in vain. Let it be the shock that ends the culture of impunity and establishes accountability throughout the public services in their dealings with Indigenous persons.

It is time for the Government of Quebec to take practical action and sit down with First Nation leaders to play an active role in the implementation of the Calls for Action of the Viens Commission. It will not be easy and will require patience on both sides as the weight of history is against us.

- 30 -

Contact: Melissa Saganash, Tel. (514) 249-8598